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Viewing cable 08BOGOTA4261, URIBE THIRD TERM SETBACK: 2010 REELECTION REJECTED

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
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| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 08BOGOTA4261 | 2008-11-26 22:47 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | CONFIDENTIAL | Embassy Bogota |

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.semana.com/wikileaks/Seccion/168.aspx>

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #4261/01 3312247
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 262247Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5773
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE 8531
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 1370
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA IMMEDIATE 6784
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE 2727
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO IMMEDIATE 7472
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHMFIUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE

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date: 11/26/2008 22:47
refid: 08BOGOTA4261
origin: Embassy Bogota
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination: 08BOGOTA4201
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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 262247Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5773
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE 8531
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 1370
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA IMMEDIATE 6784
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----- header ends -----

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 004261

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: URIBE THIRD TERM SETBACK: 2010 REELECTION REJECTED
IN FIRST CONGRESS VOTE -- 2014 REELECTION APPROVED

REF: BOGOTA 4201

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor David M. Zimov
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

1. (U) The First Commission of the Colombian House of Representatives rejected in a razor thin vote on November 26, a proposal to change the constitution to allow President Uribe to run for a third term in 2010. The Commission later approved language that would allow Uribe to seek reelection in 2014. The votes in First Commission--the first of four votes in Congress required to pass a referendum proposal--followed intense lobbying against immediate reelection from the opposition and Cambio Radical Party leader German Vargas Lleras, and the last minute abstention of two key coalition members critical of Uribe's management of a recent pyramid scheme collapse. In the wake of the setback, Uribe's supporters announced they will try to change the proposal language again in upcoming congressional debates to allow a 2010 run. Still, the legality of such a maneuver remains questionable, and could be time consuming or challenged in court. Barreras told us the First Commission vote makes immediate reelection in 2010 more unlikely--though still possible. End summary.

CONGRESS VOTES AGAINST 2010 THIRD TERM--FOR 2014

2. (U) The First Commission of the Colombian House of Representatives on November 26, voted against a proposal to hold a referendum to change the constitution to allow President Alvaro Uribe to run for a possible third term as president in 2010. In a razor thin vote of 17-16, the First Commission rejected the immediate reelection language. The Commission then immediately voted 29-4 in favor of different referendum language to allow a possible 2014 run, in the first of four votes in Congress that would be needed to move the referendum forward. If passed in all four votes, the revised 2014 measure would then move to the Constitutional Court for approval, and finally to a referendum requiring a majority--with a required 25% turnout of registered voters (approximately 7.2 million).

3. (C) Representative Nicolas Uribe announced that supporters of an immediate Uribe reelection would again try to modify

the referendum language in the second congressional vote (in the full House in early December) to allow for immediate reelection. Representative Oscar Arboleda, who favors immediate reelection, told us coalition members could legally modify the language in subsequent debates. Still, Barreras and Second Commission Secretary General Emiliano Rivera told us such a maneuver would probably be illegal, and could require time consuming Constitutional Court review if challenged. Barreras said the Commission vote made immediate reelection more unlikely, though not impossible since Uribe supporters in Congress will look for creative ways to reverse the Commission vote.

14. (C) Barreras told us there was no pressure from the Palace to vote for the 2010 measure, but intense pressure from Cambio leader German Vargas Lleras to oppose immediate reelection. Barreras said he met with President Uribe on November 20, pleading with Uribe to publicly state his third term intentions. When Barreras asked Uribe how he should vote, Uribe refused even in private to state whether he was interested in a third term--whether in 2010 or 2014. Barreras said Uribe and Interior Minister Fabio Valencia Cossio (the GOC's main lobbyist in Congress) were "completely absent" from the third term debate.

15. (C) Meanwhile, Barreras said Vargas-Lleras--who has already begun his own presidential campaign--publicly threatened to sanction Barreras for not supporting Cambio's position against a third term in 2010. Barreras told us Vargas offered other swing voters (especially Rep. Edgar Gomez) "anything they wanted" to kill the referendum. Gomez was later absent from some votes with a "medical problem." Separately, both the Inspector General (Procuraduria) and National Election Council have begun investigations into the signature collection process that began the referendum

process. The media is reporting that collapsed pyramid scheme company DMG may have supported the effort.

URIBE INSIDERS PESSIMISTIC ON 2010 RUN

16. (C) Presidential Communications Advisor Jorge Mario Eastman told us Uribe had not decided whether to run again, nor had he instructed Secretary of Government Bernardo Moreno or Interior Minister Valencia to lobby Congress to pass the constitutional amendment required. Uribe Advisor Bernardo Moreno, who is under investigation for his contact with former Congresswoman Yidis Medina (convicted of accepting bribes during the first reelection effort), was not authorized to get involved without Uribe's instructions. Eastman said the amendment effort was being directed by U Party Secretary General Luis Giraldo and presidential advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria.

17. (C) Eastman told us he had been pessimistic that Congress would pass a constitutional amendment allowing Uribe to run in 2010. Cambio Radical opposed the measure and the U Party lacked influence. Members of Congress remained focused on trying to extract concrete benefits from the presidency in exchange for votes on political reform and the referendum. The danger, Eastman said, was that no one had started to develop a process to select a unified Uribe coalition presidential candidate if Uribe did not run in 2010. Uribe continues to believe there is a capable successor within the coalition.

URIBE CONFIDANT URGES URIBE NOT TO RUN

18. (C) Separately, Uribe confidant Fabio Echeverri told us he urged Uribe to step down in 2010 and to set up a foundation that would advocate for democracy and free markets in the hemisphere. Echeverri--who has known Uribe since childhood and managed his two previous presidential campaigns--told us he opposed a second Uribe reelection because it would endanger Uribe's legacy as well as his health. Moreover, Colombia needed a break from Uribe's frenetic governing style.

¶9. (C) Echeverri added that Uribe also had the luxury in his first two terms of focusing on one issue--security. The current problems facing Colombia, including the economic slowdown and financial crisis, were not Uribe's forte. Echeverri said he has explained his opposition to reelection to Uribe on several occasions. Uribe had listened, but had not given a clear signal of his intentions.

"UNFAVORABLE CLIMATE" FOR THIRD TERM

¶10. (C) Jorge Londono, head of leading Colombian polling firm Invimar-Gallup, told us the third term effort was moving ahead at a difficult time for Uribe. By the first quarter of 2009, Londono expects the slowing economy and financial crisis, the collapse of a series of large pyramid schemes, and scandals over alleged extrajudicial killings by the military to cut into Uribe's approval ratings.

¶11. (C) Eastman added that Uribe and his Cabinet remained worried over the pyramid scheme crisis, especially the fall of the largest of the schemes, DMG (reftel). Polo Party President Carlos Gaviria told us DMG--which Eastman said "was winning the public relations battle" over the GOC--had used the media to turn many previous Uribe supporters against the president in regions like Putumayo where security used to be "the only issue." Eastman added that the GOC needed to move fast to limit the damage from the DMG scandal. Two Conservative Party coalition members of the First Commission, previously rock solid supporters of a 2010 Uribe reelection, abstained on the vote due to constituent protests against Uribe's management of the pyramid crisis.
BROWNFIELD

=====CABLE ENDS=====